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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of experienced teachers who had taken on formal roles as mentor teachers. Case studies were developed for each of 10 participants, of whom 7 were neophyte mentors. Each mentor was interviewed four times throughout the school year, while their mentees were each interviewed twice. Mentors were also observed in the classroom. Results emphasized the idiosyncratic nature of the mentor/mentee relationship, and found the district/school culture surrounding the mentor program to have a significant influence on the relationship. Since the evolution of mentor/mentee relationships is found to be highly unpredictable, it is argued that those designing such programs should emphasize creating the optimal context for positive relationships rather than attempting to mandate specific dimensions of the relationship. It is also suggested that more structured mentor programs serve to establish a more clear understanding of each participant's mission, goals, and role, as well as lending an institutional validity to these roles. The importance of training for mentor teachers in specific skills such as active listening, clinical supervision, and adult development is also stressed. (Contains 43 references.) (PB)

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The Mentor-Protégé Relationship and Its Effects on the Experienced Teacher

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Overview

In Homer's epic *The Odyssey,* Odysseus entrusted to Mentor, his friend and counselor, the care of his house and home as he sailed off to fight the Trojan Wars. Mentor was given the charge of raising Odysseus' son, Telemachus, and leading him through adolescence into adulthood. Mentor became Telemachus' trusted guide and accompanied him when, as an adult, Telemachus set out on a voyage in search of his father. The close, personal relationship which developed between the two became essential during Telemachus' quest for his father, for it allowed the goddess Athena to assist Telemachus in achieving his goal. Athena took on the image of Mentor and, as Mentor, provided Telemachus with "earthly" guidance to help him find his father. In spite of Athena's omnipotent and omniscient powers as goddess, she was careful to maintain the image of Mentor and provided Telemachus with only enough information as was "humanly" possible.

Homer's tale provides the genesis of the mentor-protégé relationship and emphasizes the two salient aspects of the relationship, guiding and assisting. These two qualities of a mentoring relationship suggests both a long-term, deeply personal and mutually rewarding relationship (Erikson, 1978; Levinson, 1979) as well as a short-term, task-oriented one (Alleman *et al.*, 1986; Healy & Welchert, 1990; Kram, 1983; Weber, 1980). In a mentor-protégé relationship, the younger member can develop personally and professionally and receive help in accomplishing specific tasks. At the same time, the older member experiences feelings of validation and regenerativity from helping a younger member (Erikson, 1978).

A proliferation of mentor programs in business, medicine, and social work have been set up and have vaunted certain success in facilitating the entry of neophyte members into these professional communities. Likewise, educational reformers have proposed that structured mentor programs be instituted in the school setting to facilitate the induction of the neophyte teachers. Proponents suggest that these programs would also afford opportunities for continuous discussion of pedagogical and curricular issues which frequently confront teachers thereby enhancing collegiality and collaboration. However, the absence of a mentor tradition in education limits the predictability of success of these programs.

The mentor programs which have been set up in schools are characterized by considerable variance in their design and structure; still, initial findings from studies of these programs would suggest that they do help the novice teachers during the critical first year(s) of teaching (Bova & Phillips, 1984; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Ganser, 1992; Huffman & Leak, 1986; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Reiman & Edelfelt, 1991; Schaffer *et al.*, 1992; Tellez, 1992). The positive effects seem to be both affective and cognitive, so that the neophyte teachers benefit from moral and

emotional support as well as pedagogical guidance as they negotiate the "reality shock" of their initial teaching experience (Veenman, 1984).

Less frequently, however, is the mentor-protégé relationship seen as a way to enhance the professional development of experienced teachers (Ackley & Gall, 1992; Manthei, 1992; Wagner, 1985). The absence of such a perspective may be tied to the implicit understanding of the mentor-protégé relationship as one in which an older and wiser person helps a younger, less experienced one to grow and develop so that the reciprocity of the process is rarely considered. Nevertheless, reports from studies on mentor-protégé relationships tenuously imply that these relationships can not only mediate the neophyte teacher's entry into teaching but also enhance the professional development of the experienced teacher (Ackley & Gall, 1992; Butler, 1989; Driscoll *et al.*, 1986; Fagan & Walter, 1982; Ganser, 1992; Manthei, 1992).

In these studies, researchers focused on assessing the affective impact of the relationship on the mentor teachers (Ackley & Gall, 1992; Butler, 1989; Fagan & Walter, 1982; Ganser, 1992) or the cognitive effects of the relationship, but from a post-program perspective where mentors were asked to report on their perceived benefits of the relationship (Manthei, 1992). In few studies have the effects of the relationship over time been traced or evidence of professional development in the experienced teacher been documented. For these reasons, I traced the mentor teachers' thinking throughout the school year in order to understand how the experience affects their thinking about teaching and their teaching practices.

In this study, I set out to examine the perceptions of experienced teachers who had taken on the role of mentor teachers. I addressed the question: How do mentor teachers describe the impact of the mentoring experience on their thinking about teaching and their teaching practices? By understanding the impact of the mentor-protégé relationship on the experienced teachers, I hoped to gain insights into potential sources of professional growth and development of inservice teachers.

Methodology

My research design consisted of developing case studies for each of the mentor teachers. The ten participants, eight women and two men, were all experienced teachers who worked in two school districts with district-run or district-sponsored mentor programs. All of them were education majors in college and had, at some point in their careers, earned master's degrees. All but one started teaching as soon as they graduated from college. They average twenty years of teaching experience, and many have spent their entire teaching careers in the same school site or district. They had all volunteered to serve as mentor teachers for the 1993-94 school year. Seven of the mentors (including both men) were neophyte mentors, while three had already served as mentors in a structured mentor program.

The mentor teachers' partners[1], nine females and two males[2], were all new to the school system in which they were teaching. Eight of them were either neophyte or novice teachers with two years or less of classroom experience, while the other three had taught for at least five years in other sites. The mentor-protégé dyads were as follows: seven female-female dyads, one male-male dyad, one male-female dyad, and one female was matched with two partners, a male and a female.

The primary source of data for this study were self-reports from the participants gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1988; Seidman, 1991). Each participant was interviewed four times throughout the school year while the partners were interviewed twice, once at the beginning and again at the end of the school year. A second source of data was observations of the mentors in their workplace. I observed them teaching and interacting with their partners. Furthermore, I attended the regularly scheduled mentor meetings for each district to find out more about the structure of the district's mentor program. These various field observations provided me with topics of discussion in subsequent interviews with the participants.

Findings and Analysis

Two critical trends emerged from the findings: the idiosyncratic nature of these relationships and the significant influence of the context, defined as both the district/school culture and the mentor program, on shaping the mentor-protégé relationship. Each of the ten relationships studied was different and attempts to categorize tentative; nevertheless, certain recurrent variables were influential in shaping many of the relationships. In the following section, I will briefly present the two school districts, their mentor programs and the relationships studied in each of the two sites.

Nine Acres

- Community and School Culture

Nine Acres is an upper-middle-class suburban town located twenty miles north of a major metropolitan area in the Northeast. With a population of approximately 18,000, the town is largely residential with sparse industry and minimal commercial areas. The residents are predominantly white (85%), well-educated professionals (51%), many of whom work in the metropolitan area and earn a median income of $100,000. The school system educates approximately 2000 students in six schools: three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one regional high school. It

[1] I opted to use the word "partner" to describe the less experienced member of the relationship, finding the words "protégé," which has a subordinate connotation, or "mentee," which is an aberration of the word mentor, inappropriate in the context of this study.
[2] One mentor teacher was matched with two partners.

vaunts a relatively stable teaching staff of 120 who benefit from adequate financial remuneration and a respectful work environment. Community support of the school system is strong and funds needed for a quality educational program are generally allocated with minimal debate.

The small size and ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic homogeneity of Nine Acres combine to create a community characterized by a shared vision of what constitutes preferred lifestyles. The communal value of education translates into strong support for the school system, allowing for enviable working conditions and competitive salaries for the faculty and staff. This personalized, "family-like" structure helps to foster an environment of collegiality and professional respect in the schools in which a common sense of purpose and mission can be developed and maintained.

- The Mentor Program

The Nine Acres mentor program was set up in September 1990 by a group of teachers and administrators with clearly articulated goals which acknowledge the potential benefits to both the new and experienced teachers. The program began with thirteen mentors matched with new teachers in grades K-8. The program has since expanded to include high school teachers and, during the year of this study (1993-94), eighteen mentor teachers were matched with an equal number of newcomers. Mentor teachers receive a leadership stipend of $500 and a per diem payment of $150 for two days of mentor training during the summer. Teachers, both mentor and new, are expected to attend monthly professional days at which topical issues are discussed. Attendance at these meeting remains constant at about 95%.

Selection criteria for mentors include a strong personal commitment to teaching and an abiding interest in professional discussion. Match-ups are generally made within a school, although exceptions, particularly with specialists, may occur. Program coordinators look to match participants by subject matter or grade level as well as site. Mentors are expected to provide socialization and instructional assistance to the new teachers and are encouraged to do so through regular meetings and peer observations.

The clearly articulated goals of the program are grounded in a theoretical framework of adult learning and resemble those which Odell (1991) identifies as key in a successful program: providing beginning teachers with guidance in their professional development and assistance in responding to immediate needs and concerns. In addition, the program provides training for the mentor teachers which Thies-Sprinthall (1986) maintains is essential for teachers who are taking on a new role. The training helps the Nine Acres participants to understand and internalize the program expectations as does the large mentor handbook which all mentors receive. These expectations provide the mentor teachers with direction as they develop the relationships with their partners. The flexibility and intentional absence of accountability of the program allow for some

individualized implementation of the program goals so that those who find the guidelines too inhibiting could opt not to confine themselves to them.

- The Relationships

The five participants were committed to the program and sought to fulfill the expectations of the program; nevertheless, of the five relationships, only three were declared successful by the participants themselves, while the other two can be called "superficial," for the two members would go through the mechanics of the relationship without there being any real substance to their interactions.

The successful relationships were characterized by sustained interaction between the two participants based on a structure the mentor teacher gave to the relationship which corresponded to the needs, wants or expectations of the newer partner. The two members' images of a mentor-protégé relationship were similar enough to allow for consensus on the structure and goals of the relationship. Thus, Nancy and her partner both saw the relationship as fulfilling certain emotional as well as intellectual needs while Joshua and his partner shared similar beliefs about the social organization of the school community which transcended differences in style or instructional preferences. For Carrie and her partner, their shared understanding of the purpose of the relationship, to help the new teacher integrate the school and department culture, was heightened by the perceived similarities in teaching styles, personalities, and even curricula.

In the superficial relationships, the mentors were unable to achieve either the program's goals or their own personal goals for the relationship in spite of regular interaction with their partners. In both instances, communication was impeded by differences in the perceived needs of the partners. While the mentor teachers structured their interactions to fit their image of the relationship and to respond to what they perceived were the most critical needs of the new partners, the partners saw their needs and wants differently. Shari patterned her relationship with the new art teacher after the successful relationship she had had with the previous art teacher and sought to provide socio-emotional support for her partner, but found the latter's expectations for the relationship contrasted significantly. Although the two felt obligated to live up to the expectations of the program, their conversations focused primarily on family news or week-end activities.

For Amber, a seasoned music teacher, communication with her partner, a neophyte music teacher, was impeded by an unwillingness on the part of the latter to ask for help and a reluctance on the part of Amber to impose her unsolicited advice or guidance. Following the guidelines of the program, Amber structured the relationship from a collegial perspective; however, this collegiality prevented Amber from responding to her partner's needs as a neophyte teacher by being more directed in her advice. They, like Shari and her partner, would interact regularly, but the depth of

these interactions remained shallow and focused primarily on administrative tasks which the new teacher needed to complete.

Bridgeford

- Community and School Culture

While geographically and physically an urban setting with a population of 95,000, Bridgeford is a study of contrasts: a large-city, urban setting with a small-town, provincial character. It is home to internationally-known institutions of higher learning and innovative, up start business ventures, as well as small, family-owned companies and neighborhood grocery stores. With a median income of $35,000, the city's working population consists primarily of professionals (45%) and technical/ administrative support (30%). The school system also embodies these contrasts in the composition of the student population and in the educational programs offered. Made up of fourteen elementary schools (K-8) and one large comprehensive high school, the system prides itself in its educational innovation and its multicultural perspective. Community support for the schools is also diverse, ranging from overbearing pressure to complete absence of involvement.

Bridgeford's bipolar population has brought about a rich mingling of cultures, languages, and traditions, as well as divergent and often conflicting needs and wants from the population. The various demands on the infrastructures drain the limited available resources, and efforts to shore up these resources have met with little success. In response, the system fosters numerous subcultures within the system by offering different educational programs at each of the elementary schools and the high school. Still, community dissatisfaction with the system's ability to respond to its needs and wants persists and is often transferred to the faculty who sense growing disdain for their efforts and a weakening of support from the central administration. Survival is the watchword as the burn-out rate among the more experienced teachers and the drop-out rate among the newer teachers increases.

- The Mentor Program

The Bridgeford mentor program was set up in 1990 by the principal of one of the elementary schools in conjunction with a member of the education faculty at a college in the area and was designed to facilitate the entry of newcomers into the Bridgeford schools. The program began with seven mentor teachers in grades K-8 working with seven newcomers. The program has grown to include twenty mentor teachers who receive a $400.00 stipend, and a part-time coordinator. The mentor teachers received no specific training, but are provided with support and direction at monthly mentor meetings. Attendance at these meetings hovers around 50%.

Program coordinators look for mentor teachers who have at least five years of experience in the Bridgeford system and show a strong commitment to teaching. The matching of mentors with newcomers has varied from year to year; in the year of this study, newcomers were to request a mentor and the coordinator would match them with a mentor teacher in their site, if available. Mentors are expected to "assist the newcomers in survival" during their first year in Bridgeford. The methods or means used to achieve the articulated goal is left to the discretion of the mentor teachers, but the focus is clearly on survival.

The Bridgeford program is a loosely structured program whose goals are verbally communicated to the mentor teachers, but not necessarily to the newcomers. These goals stress socialization with survival the ultimate goal. The program's informality and ambiguous conceptual grounding afford it a certain flexibility to respond to the particular needs and interests of the participants. However, the responses are not always perceived as being timely nor applicable. The absence of preparation or training for the mentor teachers suggests that the program co-ordinators subscribe to the view that teaching experience suffices for teachers who are adopting the role of mentor teacher. Kennedy (1991) and others (Little, 1990; Thies-Sprinthall, 1986), however, would disagree, arguing that the training is one of the key variables to successful programs.

The Bridgeford program provides support for the mentor teachers while refraining from imposing any kind of structure, which for some participants, is sufficient, while others long for a structure that would communicate to both the mentor and the new teachers what the program expectations are. The recurrent reference to survival at the mentor meetings would suggest that teachers feel they have minimal support from the central office. In response, the mentor program and the teachers in it have become yet another subculture within an unyielding system.

- The Relationships

As did the five participants in Nine Acres, the Bridgeford participants also exhibited a commitment to their relationships and a desire to help the newcomers. In fact, their commitments were enhanced by their loyalty to a community in which they had grown up and an ownership for a school system in which they had spent almost all of their teaching careers. Cognizant of the substantial challenges which the Bridgeford schools presented, the mentor teachers felt an even stronger mandate to be of assistance to the new teachers. Yet, only two of the five relationships were described as being successful while the other three were labeled "non-relationships" due to the paucity of interactions between the two members.

These successful relationships were characterized by frequent and meaningful interaction between the mentor and new teachers which were augmented by a certain urgency, on the part of the mentor teachers, to provide the necessary support so that these new teachers could successfully complete the school year. Appreciative of the help which they had received during their first years

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of teaching and desirous to reciprocate, the mentor teachers sought to structure their interactions to respond to the needs of their less experienced partners, as identified by the new teachers themselves. In fact, Aisha had only a nebulous image of a mentor-protégé relationship and looked to the needs of her partners to structure her interactions with them. Likewise, Peter saw himself as meeting his partner's significant emotional and pedagogical needs as the latter struggled through his first teaching experience.

The non-relationships were characterized by an absence of interaction so that no relationship ever developed between the two members. The mentor teachers set up the relationships to respond to the new teachers' needs as they perceived them, yet, other variables impeded any sustained interaction between the two members of these dyads, blocking the development of a relationship. For Maryse and her partner, similarities in their personalities -- both described themselves as "very shy" -- and misunderstood procedural expectations -- each was waiting for the other to make the connection -- inhibited the relationship. Margaret's relationship with her partner suffered from dissimilarities in personalities which were aggravated by generational changes in appropriate norms of behavior and interaction. In addition, environmental variables, such as the absence of physical proximity of their classrooms and differing educational programs, Margaret being in the regular education program and her partner in the special education program, compounded the impediments to this relationship. Elise's relationship with her partner suffered a similar fate: the two worked in two different educational programs and Elise found herself unknowledgeable about her partner's concerns and unable to assist her.

The Effects of the Relationship on the Experienced Teachers

All of the mentor teachers began the year with the intention of establishing a good working relationship with their newcomers, yet only five participants declared their relationships successful. Because the presumption that an effective relationship existed underlies the study of the relationships' impact on the mentor teacher, I limit this next discussion to the five relationships which were deemed successful by the participants. This is not to imply that the other relationships were negative; rather, they were non- or superficial relationships in which there was no sustained or no meaningful interaction between the two members of the dyad, and as such of questionable analytical value in discerning how these relationships affected the experienced teachers' thinking.

The five participants all expressed satisfaction in helping their partners get through their first year in the school environments, a finding which supports that of Ganser (1992) and Ackley and Gall (1992) whose participants expressed satisfaction in helping a colleague and pride in contributing to the profession. Beyond the self-congratulatory reaction to the relationship, the participants spoke of different responses which I have grouped into three categories: professional growth, personal growth, and reinforcement of existing beliefs and practices.

- Professional Growth

I define professional growth as a change in one's cognitive structures brought about through interaction with new knowledge or information. In teachers, professional growth would be evidenced by changes in thinking or in practices related to teaching. As such, two participants exhibited evidence of professional growth during the year of their participation in the program. Nancy's regular conversations with her partner ignited her thinking about issues of concern to her and led her to interact with new ideas. In particular, she found herself re-assessing and re-designing certain administrative procedures which were problematic for her partner, and upon reflection, for Nancy as well. Peter's sustained interactions with his partner, in combination with the arrival of four new teachers in the upper grades, provided a "zap of energy" and a fodder of new ideas and information, bringing about professional growth in Peter as he and his colleagues rethought and redesigned the language arts curriculum in the upper grades.

- Personal Growth

Personal growth is defined as a greater understanding of self, leading to changes in one's thinking about self or one's behaviors. Two of the participants, Joshua and Peter, evidenced personal growth from their relationship and for one, it was an intended outcome of the relationship. Joshua's applying to the program was motivated in part by the anticipation of personal growth, that is, enhancing his interpersonal/social skills, and he was gratified to realize that his goal of being "a little bit easier to get along with" was achieved. Peter's frequent conversations with his partner about teaching re-awakened a more egocentric perspective in Peter as he began to focus more on his own, rather than his students' future. At mid-year, Peter applied for and was hired for the position of acting assistant principal.

- Reinforcement of Existing Beliefs and Practices

Two of the participants, Aisha and Carrie, manifested little evidence of any changes in their thinking about teaching or themselves; rather the relationships served to validate and reinforce their existing beliefs and practices. These two participants saw themselves as expert teachers who had much to offer to new teachers. They willingly and eagerly shared their pedagogical and educational skills and knowledge with their partners, and as they saw their partners adapt to their new environments and succeed in their classrooms, Aisha and Carrie felt pride for their partners' effective integration, which they attributed to their effective mentoring. This experience served to validate their thinking about teaching and confirmed their beliefs in their own teaching expertise.

Discussion

The question of how the relationship impacts on experienced teachers' thinking about teaching remains. Among the participants, there was little self-reported acknowledgment of any change in their thinking about teaching which could be attributed to the mentor-protégé relationship. Although the participants would speak in vague terms about the value of collegial interactions with less experienced practitioners, few expected to enhance their own pedagogical knowledge or to make changes in their teaching practices. They were the more knowledgeable members of the dyad, in terms of both school culture and pedagogy, and defined their role as one of transmitting that knowledge to their partners in the most appropriate way or of guiding their partners in their acquisition of this knowledge.

The impact of the relationship on the participants' teaching practices remains equally enigmatic since none of them could articulate any discernible impact of the relationship on their pedagogy in the short term. In fact, Joshua was firm in his assertion that any changes in his teaching which may have occurred over the course of the school year were due to other factors, primarily situational, and not to his relationship with his partner. While Nancy and Peter showed evidence of professional development, it was not necessarily pedagogically-oriented. Nancy's changes in administrative practices and Peter's work in curriculum development had the potential to affect teaching practices, but attempts to verify and validate causation remain tenuous at best.

Ganser (1992) and Thies-Sprinthall's (1986) contention that serving as a mentor is a reflective experience in which the mentor teacher grows professionally is not clearly evident in the findings of this study. Only in two cases, Nancy and Peter, was there evidence that the mentor teacher experienced some kind of professional growth, and that in rather unusual circumstances. Nancy's partner was a veteran teacher with as much as, if not more teaching experience than Nancy, thereby severely limiting any suggestion of generalizability about the effects of the relationship on the experienced teacher. Peter's professional growth may be more attributable to the infusion of new ideas and enthusiasm brought by the four new members of the cluster than to his relationship with his partner.

The findings from this study do not overwhelmingly suggest that mentor relationships help experienced teachers to develop professionally. But a rethinking of the concept of teacher professional development may shed a different light on the impact of the relationship. While the concept implies a focus on the professional knowledge and skills of a teacher, Howey (1988) and others (Raymond *et al.*, 1992) assert that staff development programs should also look to enhance the teacher's personal development, arguing that the teacher as a person cannot be separated from the teacher as a professional. They contend that addressing either the personal, professional, or career needs and wants of the teacher will impact on the other needs and wants and help the teacher to develop.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) also speak of three areas of teacher development — knowledge and skill, understanding of self, and ecological change — which they believe need to be addressed in order to enhance a teacher's effectiveness. From this perspective, the findings from this study would provide evidence to support the contention that the mentor relationship helps some experienced teachers to develop. Three of the participants in the successful relationships, Nancy, Joshua, and Peter, did experience change in their thinking or in their attitudes about their teaching or themselves.

The mentor relationship as a form of teacher development is not without its limitations. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) point out several weaknesses to a "humanistic approach" (p. 12) of teacher development, noting in particular, the unpredictable and highly individualistic nature of the outcomes. Furthermore, Hargreaves and Fullan speak of the non-replicability of the experiences which are based on personal relations and interactions. The findings of this study would appear to confirm these qualities. Not only were the outcomes of each relationship quite different, but also unplanned and unpredicted. Shari's attempt to replicate her previous mentor relationship stifled her current relationship, while Joshua, Nancy, and Carrie all appreciated the uniqueness of their mentor-protégé relationships, and at the end of the year of this study, chose not to re-apply to the program.

In this study, half of the matchings did not develop into relationships between the two partners. In fact, in three of the matchings, the participants had fewer interactions with their partners than they had with other colleagues. This mediocre success rate raises a number of questions about the viability of formal mentor programs to foster such relationships which are largely dependent on interpersonal interactions. Little (1990) argues that a formalized procedure cannot create what she contends is an informal, interpersonal event, especially not in a setting in which the requisite norms of interactions (collegiality and cooperation) for such an event are rarely found. In fact, Gehrke and Kay (1984), Kram (1986), and Fagan and Walter (1982) all recommend caution in establishing a formal mentor program and express doubt that such an informal, enduring relationship can be nurtured in a formal program.

Sparse empirical evidence exists to challenge this position regarding the effectiveness of formal mentor programs. The formal mentor programs in this study did not appear to achieve a greater number of successful relationships than mere chance or coincidence. The Nine Acres program, the more structured of the two, did have a higher rate of success than the Bridgeford program, similar to that which Brzoska (1987) and Gehrke (1988a) found in their studies. The Nine Acres participants affirmed that the structure of the program did in fact facilitate the development of their relationships while the Bridgeford participants bemoaned the dearth of direction and guidance from the program which provided support but indiscernible structure.

Rosenholtz's (1989) contention that a strong school culture is a more opportune setting for teacher development may not be borne out by these findings; nevertheless, the differences in school cultures did help to shape the relationships. The stark contrasts between the two districts remained constant throughout the study and were evident in the various elements affecting the relationship. The small, cohesive and collegial environment of the Nine Acres school system allowed for a clearly defined and structured mentor program with articulated goals and expectations. The clarity and resonance of the Nine Acres educational philosophy allowed for less freedom in the teachers' individual philosophies, yet, it helped teachers to define themselves within the culture and to understand their responsibilities for their mentor relationships. The large, federated nature of the Bridgeford school district sent ambiguous and diverse messages to the teachers, encouraging greater freedom of educational philosophies, while creating confusion over the district's overriding mission. A similar *laissez-faire* approach was present in the mentor program which encouraged mentor teachers to respond to their partners according to individually-established criteria, making each relationship different and unique.

The particular school settings did not seem to play a significant role in fostering or hindering the development of the relationship, although the more collegial ethos of the Nine Acres schools may have contributed to a greater willingness on the participants' part to invest time and energy into the relationship, seemingly supporting Odell's (1991) contention that a working environment which values community will positively influence the mentor relationship. The Nine Acres participants all had positive relationships with their work environment and were willing to introduce their partners into the environment so that they, too, would appreciate the congenial atmosphere. In Bridgeford, the participants' affiliations with their schools were more ambivalent and this ambivalence was translated into a focus on survival strategies and coping techniques which mentor teachers shared with their partners. Whereas the Nine Acres mentors sought to bring the newcomers into the school family, the Bridgeford mentors looked to fortify the newcomers with the necessary ammunition to survive in the unfriendly environment of the schools.

The finding of a fifty percent success rate of the relationships serves to emphasize their idiosyncratic nature whose effectiveness can be only unreliably predicted. Nevertheless, researchers look to gain an edge on the unpredictability of the relationships by trying to identify factors which may have an impact on the relationships. Galvez-Hjornevik (1986) and Levinson (1986) speak of interpersonal factors, such as age and gender as influential in an effective mentor relationship, whereas Odell (1991), Gehrke (1988b), and Reiman and Edelfelt (1991) posit that contextual variables, physical proximity, common free time, subject matter or grade level similarity, are equally integral to the relationship. Yet, it is clear that the fragility of the dyadic dynamic resists attempts at mechanistic, merely predictive modeling.

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In their own analyses of the relationships in this study, all ten of the participants indicated personality as the salient, and in most cases, the only variable influencing the relationship, either positively or negatively. This finding would lend support to Galvez-Hjornevik (1986) and Levinson's (1986) position of the importance of interpersonal factors. Only Margaret and Elise identified any other factors which significantly affected their relationship and cited the differing educational programs (contextual variable) and the generational differences (interpersonal variable) as the most influential ones. Levinson (1979) cautions against too large an age span in the mentor-protégé relationship, and in two of the relationships, the generational difference was an inhibiting factor not because the two members had irreconcilable substantive differences, but because they had contradictory norms of social interaction and neither could recognize or appreciate this inconsistency.

Some of the "better" matches in the study did not develop, while others with a lower predictability rating were successful. Still others violated every guideline for matching mentors and protégé with the expected results. Amber's matching with her partner would appear to be a good fit: both were elementary music teachers, female, about fifteen years difference in age, with similar training in music education, yet the relationship stumbled along and achieved little of substance. Joshua's matching, on the other hand, seemed to be a mismatch: a male Latin teacher in his mid-forties with a female Spanish teacher in her mid-twenties. The genders were opposite, the subjects were different, the age span was too great; still, by both accounts, their relationship was "tremendously satisfying." Different rules of logic seem to apply in interpersonal relations.

A reliance on interpersonal or contextual variables to predict the success of the relationship would seem to suggest misguided efforts to try to control the uncontrollable, to formalize the informal, and to structure the idiosyncratic. Mentor-protégé relationships revolve around persons who are highly individualistic, idiosyncratic, and unpredictable. Trying to "scientifically" match two people to create a "deep and lasting friendship" would seem to be doomed to failure from the start. Yet, the penchant for encoding and categorizing remains ever pervasive.

Implications and Recommendations

The unpredictability of the mentor-protégé relationship, in terms of experience and outcomes warrants careful consideration. The potential benefits in terms of teacher development which both partners can derive remain significant and the costs to implement a mentor program relatively minimal, making it a candidate for quick and easy adaptation by school systems looking to promote faculty development. However, as Aisha's partner so aptly pointed out, "It is not enough to say, 'We have a mentor program in our district.'" More needs to be done at the district

and school level to ensure the effectiveness of the relationship so that experienced teachers' development, evident in the successful relationships in this study, can in fact be realized.

The above suggests the existence of a formula or prescription which, if followed, would ensure the success of mentor relationships and allow for the growth and development of the experienced teachers. Although I would like to be able to be more prescriptive for the establishment of effective mentor relationships, their unpredictable nature makes such a prescription based more on intuition than on empirical evidence. The findings of this study do not warrant predictive or prescriptive formula, rather, I can suggest that when establishing a program, policy makers and district administrators carefully consider three variables: the personalities of the participants, the structure of the mentor program, and the community, district, and school environments. The implications which follow are based on the findings and look to optimize the mentor-protégé relationship *within a given context*. The community, district, and school environments constitute key variables in an effective mentor program, just as it does in any faculty development project, and must be fully understood and carefully considered when designing and implementing such a program.

The first implication of this study relates to the structure of the mentor program within which the relationships are to develop. Little's (1990) skepticism of the feasibility of formalizing the informal looms ever present, reminding us of the highly subjective nature of the relationship which makes policy recommendations of speculative value, yet the findings suggest that a structured program can help to facilitate successful relationships without necessarily ensuring their success. A formal mentor program provides a common foundation from which all participants in the program can understand the mission and goals of the program and creates a coherence so that a common language and shared expectations characterize the program. Equally, a formal program lends an institutional validity to the new roles which the mentor teachers are undertaking so that they see their new roles as something which is valued by the central administration. Finally, a structured program also provides a set of expectations for all participants which can serve to push along lethargic or recalcitrant relationships as in Shari's and Amber's situations.

Administrators looking to set up a program would want to establish a set of goals to be communicated to all participants, both mentor and new teachers, which would reflect the underlying philosophy of the program and would be shaped by the specific school setting and the ethos of the district. The goals of a mentor program in an urban setting would vary from those in a suburban school system for the challenges and demands of the classroom and the needs of the teachers in the two environments differ significantly. District and local administrators need to take care to design a context-appropriate program and to ensure its successful implementation.

A second implication which can be drawn from this study focuses on the mentor-protégé relationship and suggests that this relationship can be neither mandated nor even predicted with any

degree of accuracy. The relationship is dependent on the personalities of the partners involved and this matching of personalities remains an inexact and speculative science. Rather than expecting to create *optimal relationships* between mentors and protégés, policy makers or practitioners should seek to create *optimal conditions* for the relationship to develop and accept the inevitability that a number of the matches will not flourish. Situational and interpersonal variables can and should be taken into account in the matching process, but they can and should not be seen as predictors of success. The guidelines regarding these variables which have been articulated in previous studies (Gehrke, 1988a; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986; Little, 1990; Odell, 1991; Reiman & Edelfelt, 1991; Wildman *et al.*, 1992) could be reiterated, with a cautionary note attached. These diverse variables influenced the relationships to varying degrees, but no one variable, except for the three previously articulated – program, personality, and environment – can be labeled as more or less influential in determining the success of the relationships. Attempts to hypothesize or prioritize their importance would be tenuous at best. Still, program coordinators would be wise to consider these variables as potentially affecting the relationship and use them as guides in matching partners.

A third implication revolves around preparation for experienced teachers assuming the new role of mentor. Because of the familiarity of the environment, the temptation is great to assume that the new role of mentor teacher can be readily and easily mastered with little or no preparation, yet Kennedy (1991) maintains that effective teachers of children cannot be presumed effective teachers of teachers. The interpersonal relations which frame the teacher-student learning process is not applicable in a teacher-teacher (peer) learning situation. Little (1990) even suggests that the norms of interaction required in such a situation are uncommon to most school environments, emphasizing the urgency of some kind of preparation for the role of mentor teacher.

Thies-Sprinthall (1986) and others (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Odell, 1991) argue that mentor teachers need training in areas such as active listening skills, clinical supervision, and adult development to be effective mentors. Yet the findings of this study would not lend support to their position. Margaret was the only participant to have taken part in the mentor workshop and was a partner in one of the non-relationships, while Aisha and Peter did not receive specific training for their new roles and had, by their own estimation, successful relationships. The findings do suggest that both mentor and new teachers need to have an unambiguous understanding of the relationship, especially as it is defined in their particular setting, to maximize the potential benefits.

The preparation which the experienced teacher receives is dependent upon and a manifestation of the goal and mission of the mentor program which the district has established. If mentor teachers are expected to fill specific developmental functions, then they need to be prepared to meet these functions with training in the requisite skills and knowledge. If, however, the focus of the program is on helping new teachers survive the first year as it was in Bridgeford, then the mentor teachers must be prepared to respond to the new teachers' needs for survival.

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The key to successful mentor relationships lies in a cogent mentor program, designed to fit the specific district context, with clearly articulated and communicated goals which include appropriate preparation for the experienced teachers assuming the role of mentor teachers.

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